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Competing Proposals for the Regeneration of the Jews, 1787–1789

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On 27 September 1791 the Constituent Assembly decreed that Jewish men who fulfilled the property requirements stipulated by the Constitution would be considered active citizens with political rights equal to those of non-Jews who had satisfied the same prerequisites.¹ This piece of legislation, subsequently known as the “emancipation decree,” was the product of many heated debates between deputies who believed that Jewishness was an obstacle to citizenship and those who believed the contrary. Yet the story was more complicated than this. The debates in the Assembly were the continuation of a decades old discussion about the feasibility of the “regeneration” of the Jews, to use the terminology of the time. Regeneration roughly meant physical and moral improvement, and implied that the Jews had declined, decayed or degenerated over the centuries as a result of persecution. In addition to the debates between advocates of regeneration and those who considered Jews incapable of such a transformation, the reformers themselves presented projects that varied widely on such questions as whether Jews had the right to become citizens, whether civic or political equality sufficed to rid them of their supposed vices, and whether the state should employ special discriminatory measures in order to force the desired change.

In this paper I will discuss proposals written between 1787 and 1789 by four reformers—the comte de Mirabeau, a barrister from Nancy named Thiéry, a Jew from Metz named Isaiah Berr Bing and the best known advocate of Jewish regeneration, Abbé Henri Grégoire—in order to map out the range of positions on regeneration. Next I will propose that these positions are emblematic of differing philosophies of citizenship, each of which originated in the years shortly before the Revolution and have an impact on French politics to this day. Finally, I will argue that the legal status of the Jews was an especially popular subject among political thinkers because it touched on the larger question, which preoccupied pre-revolutionary reformers as well as the revolutionaries themselves, of the possibility of moral improvement through political change.

In 1787, the comte de Mirabeau published an essay entitled, “On the Political Reform of the Jews.”² In it he conceded that some Jews engaged in dishonest business practices, including usury. Yet he argued that these flaws, in addition

to being exaggerated by anti-Jewish agitators, were the result of historical circumstances rather than the dictates of religion or any innate character traits. Long deprived of the right to practice "useful professions," he argued, the Jews had been forced into commerce. And Mirabeau, who had inherited anti-commercial ideas from his physiocratic father, disparaged trade not only as economically sterile, but morally degrading as well. He idealized farming as an occupation that preserved the "simple morals of the countryside." Merchants, by contrast, were more prone to vice. Mirabeau wrote of a hypothetical merchant, "The habit of seeing everything from the point of view of gain must naturally tighten his feelings...his soul contracts, his sensitivity is deadened...." Under these circumstances, he might well succumb to the temptation to cheat.

Jews were even more susceptible to this kind of moral decay because their Christian neighbors, who kept them confined in squalid ghettos, crippled them with special taxes, and in general held them in contempt simply for being Jews, had removed both the means and the incentive for dealing honestly with them. Mirabeau insisted that human nature was the same everywhere, and that any people subjected to the same circumstances would act similarly.³ Conversely, an improvement in the Jews' circumstances would lead to an improvement in their conduct. By recognizing the natural equality of Jews and Gentiles in both nature and right, by removing discriminatory legislation and permitting Jews to live, educate themselves and work as other citizens, the French could pave the way, in Mirabeau's words, for the Jews' "moral and physical regeneration." He wrote, "let them be placed and maintained in possession of all the rights of citizens, and soon this equitable constitution will make them number among the most useful members of the State."⁴

Mirabeau stressed that his vision of Jewish virtue in the future was not merely hypothetical, and noted that Jews had a good reputation in England and the Netherlands, countries where they enjoyed relative freedom and esteem from their Christian neighbors. These good Jews were the empirical evidence for Mirabeau's larger claims about the possibility of regeneration.

Another piece of evidence was the German-Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. Mirabeau began his pamphlet with a 56-page eulogy to Mendelssohn, who had died the previous year. He portrayed him not only as a profound thinker and champion of religious tolerance, but as an example of the moral and intellectual potential of the Jews. He called on his readers to recognize Mendelssohn as a refutation of "the prejudice that excuses our iniquitous abuse of social power against the Jews by representing them to us as incapable of ever being either morally estimable or politically useful."⁵ Born into poverty and faced with material obstacles, limited rights and the unjust disrespect of intellectual opponents, Mendelssohn enabled Mirabeau to form an *a fortiori* argument. Namely, if a Jew could rise to greatness as a self-made man, without

the help of society, Jews in possession of equal rights and the respect of Gentiles could accomplish even more.

Mirabeau's theory about the causes of Jewish moral degeneration and the measures needed to reverse the process was identical to the position of a Jewish leader from Metz named Isaiah Berr Bing, who had in the same year published an open letter to the author of an anonymous anti-Semitic libel, called *The Cry of the Citizen against the Jews of Metz*.⁶ Rather than denying the charges that Jews defrauded Christians and practiced usury against them, Bing argued that some Jews were indeed dishonest, but that harsh circumstances, rather than the dictates of religion or a specifically "Jewish" character, had forced them to cheat to survive, and that Christians placed in a similar position would do the same. Like Mirabeau, Bing insisted that Jews were "men," subject to the same needs and above all entitled to the same rights, and argued that full exercise of those rights would result in their regeneration. He also pointed to the virtuous Jews of England and Holland as proof that civic equality would lead to moral improvement, and cited Mendelssohn as evidence of both intellectual and moral potential among the Jews.⁷

Yet other avowed advocates of Jewish regeneration deviated significantly from the positions of Mirabeau and Bing. In 1785 the Royal Society of Sciences and Arts of Metz had sponsored an essay contest on the question, "Are there means of making the Jews more useful and happier in France?"⁸ One of the three prize winning entries was written by a M. Thiéry, a barrister at the Parliament of Nancy.⁹ This essay, revised and published in 1788, made some of the same claims as those of Mirabeau and Bing. Thiéry argued that the Jews were not innately corrupt, that their religion did not teach them to defraud Christians, and that a long history of persecution "explained" their moral failings. He spoke the language of human rights and natural equality, which he used to justify his proposed reform in the Jews' legal status.¹⁰ Yet elsewhere he retreated from recommending full equality, and wrote that the Jews should not be permitted to rise to "the first ranks of society." He asked rhetorically, "...how could they govern us while professing principles and sentiments that are foreign to us....?" And elsewhere, "Are we not obligated, above all, to preserve for Christianity the preeminence and the empire that belong to it?" He wrote, "let us simply leave them the exercise of the precious rights that nature accords to all men," but in the same sentence proposed barring the Jews from positions in government, administration and the judiciary.¹¹

Departing even further from his claims about equal rights, Thiéry proposed forcing all Jews to take up a trade and requiring them to "justify their station and their work" before opening any shop or business. He also hoped that public workshops would be opened, from which one could "form and survey" the

Jews, and that rabbis would encourage them by pronouncing a solemn anathema against any Jew who refused to work.¹²

Thiéry's proposal, however, appears mild when compared with that of a competitor and fellow prize-winner in the Metz essay contest, Abbé Henri Grégoire. Ironically, Grégoire became famous as the Jews' staunchest advocate, though he was in fact one of their most violent critics. His *Essay on the Physical, Moral and Political Regeneration of the Jews* bore only the most superficial resemblance to other contemporary works on Jewish regeneration. In it Grégoire shared the premise that Jewish vice was the product of circumstance and that by changing those circumstances Christians could regenerate the Jews. Yet he departed radically in his assessment of the extent to which the Jews had degenerated. He called them "parasites," "vipers" and "vulture[s]," and described them as "cruel," "pitiless," and "fraudulent."¹³ Following the lead of the physiognomist Johann Lavater, Grégoire "proved" the moral degeneracy of the Jews by pointing to tell-tale physical traits such as "pale faces, hooked noses, deep-set eyes, protruding chins, and constricted and strongly pronounced mouth muscles."¹⁴

Furthermore, unlike Mirabeau, Bing and Thiéry, who believed that immoral Jews were immoral *despite* their religion, Grégoire faulted the religion itself, which he saw as yet another symptom of degeneration. Though uncritical of the Old Testament, Grégoire described the Talmud and subsequent rabbinical commentary as "this vast reservoir...in which the deliriums of the human mind are accumulated."¹⁵ He described the Jews as a "nation caught in lakes of gross credulity and submerged in an ocean of stupid opinions."¹⁶ This was more than Voltairean snobbery. Grégoire saw contemporary Jewish beliefs and practices not only as "unenlightened," but as a support system for immorality. He paired the evils of ignorance and vice when he denounced "a multitude of ridiculous ceremonies that can only suffocate true piety and shrink genius."¹⁷ Similarly, he observed that the Karaites, the heretical Jewish sect that denied the divinity of the Talmud, were both "the most sensible" and "the most honest" of the Jews.¹⁸

Grégoire reported without denying a catalogue of anti-Semitic libels, including charges that the Talmud authorized lying to and defrauding Christians and taking false oaths in Christian courts.¹⁹ In some places he expressed his hope for the conversion of Jews to Christianity.²⁰ Elsewhere he appeared satisfied with the prospect of their becoming Karaites or observers of "natural religion," thus limiting their dogmas to the "useful" doctrines of the unity of God, the immortality of the soul, and rewards and punishments after death.²¹ But nowhere did he believe that Jewish regeneration was possible without radical reform in matters of religion.

Another major difference between Grégoire and other advocates of Jewish regeneration was his willingness to resort to discriminatory measures and coercion in the accomplishment of his goals. In his campaign against Jewish usury, Grégoire called for a cancellation of all Christian debts to Jews and sought to prevent Jews from acquiring mortgages on the property of Christians.²² Although he envisaged Jewish participation in government, administration and the armed forces, and in this sense went further than Thiéry, Grégoire had a long list of exceptions to vocational and professional equality. He proposed to forbid Jews from serving as tax collectors, treasurers, customs officials, bursars, and other occupations that provided easy opportunities for corruption, because, in his words, "one must never lose sight of the character of the people that one proposes to rectify."²³ Jews would also be forbidden to keep inns, since they might well serve spoiled food and thereby endanger the health of their guests.²⁴

Grégoire had self-contradictory ideas about Jewish freedom of movement. On the one hand he wanted to disperse the Jews throughout the country in order to rid them of their supposed vices. He wrote, "[i]t is essential to isolate them, to break, to the extent that it is possible, all communication between them."²⁵ On the other hand he was fearful that Jews would harm the towns and villages to which they were admitted, and therefore proposed severe restrictions on Jewish residence. He recommended that municipalities fix the number of Jews allowed, and that they only admit Jews who could prove that they were artisans, artists, farmers, or, curiously, landlords.²⁶

In addition to the constraints he placed on Jewish places of residence and occupations, Grégoire had a highly coercive plan for the Jews' re-education. Rather than simply opening French schools to Jewish pupils, he proposed, in his words, to "force their children to attend our schools and submit them annually to exercises and public examinations."²⁷ In addition to indoctrinating Jewish children in school, he advocated abolishing the office of rabbi and placing in charge of the synagogues instructors specially trained in French schools and chosen in national competitions.²⁸ Grégoire did not stop here, and proposed that Jews be required to listen to "religious instruction" from Christian preachers.²⁹ His zeal to force the Jews to become virtuous was such that he even proposed that they be restricted "in some places" to living in houses that they had built themselves and wearing clothes that they had made themselves.³⁰

Two factors account for this extreme willingness to resort to coercive measures. First, Grégoire believed that the Jews of his day were so corrupt that mere legal equality would not suffice to reverse the historical process of degeneration. He admitted that "the legislator...cannot...bring about the general good without victimizing some individuals," but in a telling analogy noted that the authorities would be justified in quarantining a traveler for forty days on the mere suspicion that he carried the plague.³¹ Second, whereas Mirabeau, Bing

and even Thiéry based their arguments on notions of natural human rights, Grégoire did not think in terms of rights. His argument in favor of legal reform for the Jews was essentially utilitarian, the main point being that Jews in their current degenerate state were a severe threat to France. He wrote vaguely about giving the Jews a "fatherland" and making them "citizens," but for Grégoire this was more a matter of demanding civic morality than recognizing rights.³² Indeed, he was impatient with the concept, and wrote defensively that forcing the Jews to listen to Christian sermons was "not violating the rights of humanity."³³ What those rights were he did not make clear, and he otherwise avoided mention of rights except when referring to specific historical privileges.

What can we conclude from this brief overview of the literature on Jewish regeneration? First, the range of opinions is strikingly broad. At their most liberal, advocates of legal reform for the Jews were highly optimistic about the morally regenerating character of citizenship, which they understood as unrestricted civic and political equality guaranteed by the natural rights of man. When the question of Jewish rights came up in the Constituent Assembly, this was the position that triumphed, and Grégoire himself refrained from proposing any restrictions on the civic and political equality of the Jews. Near the other end of the spectrum was Grégoire's initial position, which showed a profound pessimism about the salutary effects of legal equality and, lacking a concept of human rights, allowed for coercive and discriminatory measures as aids toward moral improvement. This position was not defunct in 1791. It was resuscitated by Napoleon, who in 1808 issued discriminatory legislation canceling Christian debts to Jewish money lenders and prohibiting Jews from hiring replacements when drafted into the armed forces.³⁴ There was an even more extreme view on Jewish regeneration, which I have not had the time to cover in this paper, but which constituted a significant force in the debates on the Jewish question. This position consisted in a stubborn refusal to reform the legal status of the Jews, who were represented as hopelessly corrupt and therefore incapable of regeneration. The most that advocates of this view ever conceded was that if someday the Jews proved themselves worthy of citizenship, they could be naturalized and granted legal equality.³⁵

Second, the stances taken on Jewish regeneration are indicative of distinct philosophies of citizenship. The position of those who wished to grant the Jews complete equality reflected a liberal belief that citizenship corresponded primarily to a set of rights, the exercise of which would make people virtuous. This belief is reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, the liberal positions of the Constituent Assembly, and France's naturalization laws, which express confidence in the power of citizenship to encourage unselfish behavior regardless of the citizens' ethnic or religious origins.

Grégoire's position reflected a fundamental mistrust in the morally regenerative qualities of citizenship, which had to be helped along by surveillance, a rigidly didactic civic education and other coercive measures. This was not far from the ideology of the Terror, which Grégoire significantly supported, as well as the "state of emergency" authoritarianism of Napoleon and his ideological progeny.

The position of the staunchest opponents of Jewish equality reflected a smug sense of citizenship as a reward for good behavior rather than a set of rights, as well as a profound pessimism about the ability of any outsiders to rise to the level of the elect. This attitude has also had a long post-revolutionary history, and can be seen in all racial or "cultural" definitions of Frenchness, from Edouard Drumont through Vichy and to the Front National, one of whose slogans is revealingly "*être français, cela se mérite*."³⁶

Finally, the literature on Jewish regeneration, when seen in the context of larger French discussions about citizenship and morality, suggests an answer to the question of why the French were so interested in the Jews in the first place.³⁷ There were only 40,000 Jews in France in 1789, about one fifth of one percent of the population, and they were for the most part poor and powerless. Yet in addition to the pamphlets discussed in this paper, deputies took the question of the Jews to the Assembly floor at no less than 30 sessions between August 1789 and September 1791, to say nothing of discussions in municipalities, sections and Jacobin clubs and widespread coverage of the issue in newspapers.³⁸ This almost obsessive concern with a tiny minority during a time of tremendous upheaval only makes sense if one considers that thinking about the Jews helped French political and social commentators to think about questions of citizenship and its relationship to moral improvement.³⁹ Since there was a general agreement that the Jews were morally deficient, and since for many they were practically synonymous with vice, the Jews were fertile ground for thought experiments about the possibility of moral improvement through legal or political change. This dream of changing the very character of human beings, as Mona Ozouf has shown in her book *L'homme régénéré*, was central to the Revolution.⁴⁰ Seen in this context it is not a coincidence that the same revolutionaries who hoped for nothing less than the regeneration of the French nation so often found themselves writing or talking about the marginal issue of the legal status of the Jews.

NOTES

1. *Loi relative aux juifs. Donnée à Paris, le 13 novembre 1791* (Paris, 1791). Reprinted in *La Révolution française et l'émancipation des juifs* (Paris: EdHis, 1968), 6.

2. Honore Gabriel Riquetti, comte de Mirabeau, *Sur Moses Mendelssohn, sur la réforme politique des juifs: et en particulier sur la révolution tentée en leur faveur en 1753 dans la grande Bretagne* (London, 1787). Reprinted in *ibid.*, 1.
3. Mirabeau apparently drew on Montesquieu for his conviction that political and legal circumstances determined the level of virtue among any particular people. On the importance of circumstance in Montesquieu's thought see Norman Hampson, *Will and Circumstance: Montesquieu, Rousseau and the French Revolution* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983), esp. 3–25.
4. Mirabeau, *Sur Moses Mendelssohn*, 86–89.
5. *Ibid.*, 2.
6. [Philippe-François de Latour-Foissac], *Le cri du citoyen contre les Juifs de Metz. Par un capitaine d'infanterie* (Lausanne [Metz], 1786).
7. [Isaiah Berr Bing], *Lettre du Sr I.B.B. Juif de Metz, à l'auteur anonyme d'un écrit intitulé: le cri du citoyen contre les Juifs* (Metz, 1787). Reprinted in *La Révolution française et l'émancipation des juifs*, 8. The liberal, rights based stance of Bing and Mirabeau was echoed by numerous deputies in the Constituent Assembly as well as members of the Paris Commune and municipal districts. See especially Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnere, *Opinion de M. le Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnere, relativement aux persécutions qui menacent les Juifs d'Alsace* (n.p., n.d.); and *Opinion de M. le Comte Stanislas de Clermont-Tonnere, député de Paris, le 23 décembre 1789* (n.p., n.d.); and *La commune et les districts de Paris: discours, lettres, et rapports, 1790–1791, La Révolution française et l'émancipation des Juifs*, 6.
8. *Prix proposés, en 1788, par la Société royale des sciences et des arts de Metz, pour les concours de 1789 et 1790* (Metz, 1788).
9. Thiéry, *Dissertation sur cette question: est-il des moyens de rendre les Juifs plus heureux et plus utiles en France? Ouvrage couronné par la Société royale des sciences et des arts de Metz. Par M. Thiéry, Avocat au Parlement de Nancy* (Paris, 1788). Reprinted in *La Révolution Française et l'émancipation des Juifs*, 2.
10. *Ibid.*, 1–2, 36, 57–58, 68–69, 71–72, 84–85.
11. *Ibid.*, 84–85. Without using the same terminology, Thiéry advocated making the Jews what Siéyès would in the Constitution of 1791 call “passive citizens,” with equal protection under the law but deprived of the right to vote or hold public office.
12. *Ibid.*, 89–90. Thiéry's proposal on the rabbinical anathema reflects a logic similar to that of Christian authorities who forced Jews testifying in French courts to take a *more judaico* or “Jewish oath.” The Jewish witness took the special oath in the Synagogue, the Torah in his arms, and swore to tell the truth, adding, “but in case...I should employ any fraud by hiding the truth, may I be eternally cursed, and devoured and annihilated by the fire under which Sodom and Gemorrah perished, and crushed by all the maledictions written in the Torah, and may the Eternal who created the leaves, herbs and all things, never come to my aid, nor to my assistance in any of my affairs or efforts; but if I tell the truth, and act rightly, may Adonai help me and no more.” Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Du juif à l'israélite: histoire d'une mutation (1770–1870)* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 250–51. On the

abolition of the *more judaico* see David Feuerwerker, *L'émancipation des Juifs en France de l'Ancien Régime à la fin du Second Empire* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1976), 565–650.

13. Abbé Henri Grégoire, *Essai sur la régénération physique, morale et politique des Juifs* (Paris, 1789; reprint, Paris: Flammarion, 1988), 52, 84, 96, 97, 147.

14. *Ibid.*, 72.

15. *Ibid.*, 87.

16. *Ibid.*, 161.

17. *Ibid.*, 164.

18. *Ibid.*, 185n. Grégoire's view of the Karaites is identical to that of the anti-Semitic pamphleteer François Hell, who claimed that they were "the most able and the most honest people in the Jewish nation. *Observations d'un Alsacien sur l'affaire présente des Juifs d'Alsace* (Frankfurt, 1779), 22.

19. Grégoire, *Essai sur la régénération*, 87–91.

20. *Ibid.*, 134, 149.

21. *Ibid.*, 87, 90, 113, 165, 185n.

22. *Ibid.*, 159.

23. *Ibid.*, 143.

24. *Ibid.*, 143.

25. *Ibid.*, 144–145.

26. *Ibid.*, 146–147.

27. *Ibid.*, 171,

28. *Ibid.*, 158–159.

29. *Ibid.*, 149,

30. *Ibid.*, 122.

31. *Ibid.*, 170.

32. *Ibid.*, 84, 137, 139–140, 161.

33. *Ibid.*, 149.

34. Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews and the Sanhedrin* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 124–127.

35. Hell, *Observations*; [Latour-Foissac], *Cri du citoyen*; [Latour-Foissac], *Plaidoyer contre l'usure des Juifs des Evêchés, de l'Alsace et de la Lorraine* (n.p., n.d.); Henri de la Fare, *Opinion de M. l'Evêque de Nancy, député de Lorraine, sur l'admissibilité des juifs à la plénitude de l'état-civil, et des droits de citoyens actifs* (n.d., n.d.); Prince de Broglie, *Opinion de M. le Prince de Broglie sur l'admission des juifs à l'état civil* (n.p., n.d.).

36. On the opposing attitudes towards foreigners see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), esp. 85–113, 138–164. The slogan of the National Front has furnished the title of a book by Jean-Yves Le Gallou, *Etre français, cela se mérite* (Paris: Albatros, 1987).

37. It is often assumed that the Jewish question has been of greater interest to Jewish historians than it was to the French. Eugen Weber has claimed, “the Jewish question was a Jewish question,” of little or no interest to the French, who “thought about Jews hardly at all.” “Reflections on the Jews in France,” in *Jews in Modern France*, ed. Frances Malino and Bernard Wasserstein (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 8, 16. Yet the volume of written material and the frequency of public debates on the status of the Jews during the revolutionary period belies this assumption.

38. The *Archives parlementaires* report 24 discussions regarding the Jews on the following dates: 3 August, 1 and 28 September, 14 October, 21 November, 21, 23, 24 and 25 December 1789; 28 and 29 January, 9, 25 and 26 February, 23 March, 13, 15 and 16 April, 10 May, and 20 and 21 July 1790; 18 January and 27 and 28 September 1791. *Archives parlementaires*, 8: 336; 9: 201, 444; 10: 208, 695, 754–758, 776–782; 11: 363–365, 372–373, 520, 698, 710; 12: 309, 711; 13: 69–70, 76–77; 15: 452–453; 17: 214–220; 22: 218–219; 31: 372–373, 441–442. Of the six sessions not recorded in the *Archives parlementaires*, those of 23 August and 3 September 1789, and 30 January 1790 are reported in *Réimpression de l'ancien Moniteur: depuis la réunion des Etats-généraux jusqu'au Consulat (mai 1789-novembre 1799) avec des notes explicatives* (Paris, 1840–45), 1: no. 45, 21–23 August 1789, 374b; no. 51, 4 September 1789, 420a; and 3: 1 February 1790, no. 32, 257b. The session of 2 September 1789 is covered in Brissot's *Patriote français*, no. 34, 4 September 1789, 1. That of 7 September 1789 is reported in the *Courier français*, 9 September 1789, 5–6. Finally, the session of 15 September 1789 is discussed in *Le point du jour, ou Résultat de ce qui s'est passé la veille à l'Assemblée Nationale*, no. 81, 17 September 1789, 3. See also: *Très-humble et très respectueuse Adresse que présente à l'Assemblée nationale la commune toute entière de la ville de Strasbourg* (Paris, 1790); and [Richard François Philippe Brunck], *Rapport lu à l'assemblée de la société des amis de la constitution le 27 février mil sept cent quatre-vingt-dix sur la question de l'état civil des Juifs d'Alsace* [Strasbourg, 1790]. Approximately 70 polemical pamphlets from 1789 to 1791, not including broadsides, translations, duplicate editions and foreign works are listed in Zosa Szajkowski, “The Emancipation of Jews during the French Revolution,” in *Jews and the French Revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1970), 849–918. Fifty of the most important pamphlets are reproduced in volumes 5 through 8 of *La Révolution française et l'émancipation des Juifs*. Among the journals that followed the debates closely were the *Moniteur*, *Courrier de Versailles*, *Mercure de France*, *Gazette de Paris*, *Courier français*, *Annales patriotiques*, *Courrier de Provence*, *Point du Jour*, and *Révolutions de Paris*. Even Jean-Paul Marat, who found the discussion on Jewish rights a waste of time, reported it nonetheless in *L'ami du peuple*, no. 76, 24 December 1789, 5–8, and no. 77, 25 December 1789, 2–3, 6–7.

39. Gary Kates has noted that the debates in the Constituent Assembly were primarily about whether Jews would be eligible for the political rights of active citizens, and has pointed to the apparent strangeness of a busy Assembly occupying itself with the

political rights of Jews. He observes perceptively that the Jews were primarily “symbols of something else.” Yet his more specific claim, that the Jews provided revolutionaries with a vehicle for talking about the extent to which the Constitution should be democratic, is problematic. Kates writes that revolutionaries “used the issue to test what was then perhaps the most fundamental political question: Would the promises inherent in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen translate into equal political power for all Frenchmen, regardless of status, or would those leading the Revolution stop short of democracy by limiting the political power of certain kinds of people?” “Jews into Frenchmen: Nationality and Representation in Revolutionary France,” in *The French Revolution and the Birth of Modernity*, ed. Ferenc Fehér (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 109. This is an elegant hypothesis, and might help to explain the pro-Jewish activity of Robespierre, Brissot and Grégoire. Yet it is contradicted by the fact that most of the deputies who supported Jewish citizenship had serious reservations about democracy, namely Clermont-Tonnerre, Le Chapelier, Barnave, Duport, Lameth, Dupont de Nemours, Talleyrand, Mirabeau and Charles Bouche. Meanwhile, the anti-Jewish deputies Rewbell and Hell were decidedly on the left. Moreover, since the deputies had already agreed on property restrictions for all active citizens, the “emancipation” of propertied Jews could not have been seen as a democratic move.

40. Mona Ozouf, *L'homme régénéré: essais sur la Révolution française* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), esp. 116–157.